## MIA: Early American Marxism: The Communist International [Comintern] (1919-1930) History

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## The Communist International (1919-1943)

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

The Communist International was the successor to

the group of parties associated with the Left Wing of the Zimmerwald Conventions. First and foremost, of course, was the Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks)—the organization which had seized the reins of the Russian empire in November of 1917 and was in the midst of consolidating its position in a bloody civil war. To a great extent, the establishment of the Comintern was a manifestation of the Russian desire for a final solution to its civil war through world revolution. Representatives of revolutionary parties and trends from around the globe were sought for participation in the new international organization.

1. Founding Congress—Moscow—March 2-6, 1919.

The Founding Congress was attended by 34 delegates with decisive vote and 18 with consultative vote.

A stenographic report of the Founding Congress of the Comintern was published in German in 1921 and in Russian translation that same year. An English translation of the German original was published by Pathfinder Press in 1987. [Various speeches of the Founding Congress may be viewed here as html documents.]

The First Congress did not elect an Executive Committee; it was to consist of delegates from the Communist Parties of Russia, Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Balkan Federation, Switzerrland, and Scandinavia.

The Communist Labor Party of America applied for Comintern membership on September 21, 1919.

The Communist Party of America applied for Comintern membership on November 24, 1919.

The Socialist Party of America applied for Comintern membership on March 12, 1920.

Conference —Amsterdam, Netherlands—February 10-17, 1920.

The February 1920 conference was attended by 16 delegates, including representatives of the Communist Parties of Russia (by mandate), Germany, America (CPA International Secretary Louis C. Fraina the delegate); the British Socialist Party, the Workers' Socialist Federattion, and the Stop Stewards and Workers' Committees;

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the Swiss and Belgian Communist movements. There were also 5 delegates present with voice and no vote. The conference adopted an extensive thesis on unionism, which was prepared and introduced by Fraina, as well as theses on Social-Patriotism and Unity.

2. Second Congress—Moscow & Petrograd—July 19 - August 7, 1920.

The Second Congress was attended by more than 220 delegates, including 167 with decisive votes.

A stenographic report of the 2nd Congress of the Comintern was published in German in Hamburg in 1921 and in Russian translation that same year. A second edition in Russian was published in 1934, correcting some important errors. An English translation (in two volumes) of the German original was published by New Park Publications in 1977. [This material may be viewed here as an html document.]

In light of the hasty decision to convene the Founding Congress of the Comintern, with its list of delegates determined as much as anything by accidents of geography, in a certain sense the "Second Congress" of the Communist International should be regarded as the first.

The Communist Party of America dispatched two representatives to Moscow to serve as its delegates at the 2nd Congress (Louis C. Fraina and Alexander Stoklitsky) prior to the Bridgman Unity Convention of May 1920. The majority of the members of the old CPA refused to join the United Communist Party of America at this time, resulting in the continued existence of two communist organizations in America. After the conclusion of the Unity Convention, UCP member Edward Lindgren ["Flynn"] was sent to Moscow to serve as a Comintern Congress delegate, joining three other members of the former Communist Labor Party of America already there: former CLP International Delegates John Reed and Alexander Bilan, as well as Eadmonn MacAlpine. Lindgren brought news of the Unity Convention and the group decided to press for Comintern ratification of the new party by unseating the CPA delegation. No information on the Unity Convention and continued split had arrived from the old CPA, however, and the Credentials Commissionm, reluctant to make a ruling on the basis of incomplete information, upheld the mandates of Fraina and Stoklitsky. This decision, ratified by a 19-9 vote on the floor of the Congress, recognized the UCP as the majority party in America and accorded its delegates 6 votes, while the old CPA was regarded as the minority party and allocated 4 votes. [See the stenographic report of the brief debate on this matter, Lindgren speaking for the UCP and Fraina for the old CPA.]

The Second Congress approved the "21 Conditions" for admission to the Communist International.

The Second Congress elected an Executive Committee for the first time. It consisted of delegates from Russia (5 members, 6 candidates), Germany (1 member, 1 candidate), France, Great Britainm The United States (2 delegates—Reed of the UCP and Nicholas Hourwich [Gurvich; "Andrew"] of the Communist Party of America), Italy (1 member, 1 candidate) Czechoslovakia, Austria, Scandinavia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, the Far East, the Near East, Finland, Poland, Holland (2 delegates), Latvia (1 candidate), Hungary, Georgia, Java, and a Youth representative. This group in turn

elected a small bureau consisting of Zinoviev, Bukharin, and Kobetsky (Russia); Runniansky (Hungary); and Meyer (Germany).

The small bureau was later enlarged to include Kun (Hungary), Rosmer (France), Koenen, and Radek (Russia).

First Congress of Peoples of the East—Baku—September 1-8, 1920.

A stenographic report of the First Congress of Peoples of the East was published in Russian in 1920. An English translation was published in Moscow in 1922 and a German translation that same year. A new English translation was made by Brian Pearce and published in London by Hammersmith Books in 1970. [This stenographic report is available here as an html document.]

4. 3rd World Congress—Moscow—June 22 - August 12, 1921.

A stenographic report of the 3rd Congress of the Comintern was published in German in Hamburg in 1921 and in Russian translation in 1922. An abridged report of the proceedings in English was published in London by the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1921.

The Third Congress did not directly elect an Executive Committee, but decided that the 4 parties with 40 votes at the Congress should send two delegates and the 14 countries with 20 to 20 votes should send one delegate. The first American delegate dispatched to Moscow as a representative to the ECCI was Oscar Tyverovsky ["Baldwin"].

This body was subsequently "enlarged" in 1921-22; 15 new Communist Parties were allotted delegates with consultative votes and other parties were allowed a second vote. The United States was allotted two representatives by the time of the 4th Congress: Ludwig E. Katterfeld ["Carr"]—who replaced Tyverovsky—and James P. Cannon ["Cook"]. The ECCI elected a presidium consisting of Zinoviev, Radek, and Bukharin (Russia); Heckert (Germany); Souvarine (France); Genanri (Italy); Kun (Hungary); and Humbert-Droz (Switzerland). A three member Secretariat consisting of Kuusinen (Finland), Rakosi (Hungary), and Humbert-Droz handled day-to-day organizational details.

Although not originally intended as such, the formal gatherings of the "enlarged"
Executive Committee of the Comintern rapidly came to supplant the more cumbersome and logistically difficult World Congresses of that body. With communications between Moscow and the rest of the world still shaky in this period, the doubling of representation at the gathering allowed the dispatch of half the delegates home again to directly relate the decisions of the gathering to their repsective national parties.

American Delegates to the 3rd Congress included Max Bedacht.

First Congress of Toilers of the Far East—Moscow and Petrograd —Jan. 21 - Feb. 2, 1922.

This gathering was attended by delegates from China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, and the peoples of Siberia.

It was not the Third Congress but rather the 1st Enlarged Plenum which actively advanced the slogan of the "United Front"—the call for the gathering itself, made in January 1922, took the form of an open manifesto to the workers of the world entitled "For the United Front of the Proletariat."

5. 1st Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—Feb. 21 - March 4, 1922.

The First Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International was attended by 105 delegates from 36 sections. The Plenum considered the theses on the United Front, a proposal from the Vienna Union for a joint conference of the executives of the three Internationals, the war danger, communist work in the trade unions, and the situation in the French and British Communist Parties.

The Plenum elected a new Presidium, consisting of Zinoviev, Radek, and Bukharin (Russia); Brandler (Germany); Souvarine (France); Terracini (Italy); Keribich (Czechoslovakia); and Katterfeld (USA). Candidates were Genrik Valetskii (Russia) and Otto Kuusinen (Finland).

Max Bedacht also was present as a delegate of the American Communist movement.

6. 2nd Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—June 7-11, 1922.

The Second Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern was attended by 41 delegates from 17 countries with voting powers, and 9 additional delegates with voice but no vote. In addition, there were 4 representatives of the Red International of Trade Unions and 4 representatives of the Communist Youth International with votes. Another account states that there were a total of 60 delegates in attendance.

A great deal of time was spent by the plenum discussing the affairs of the Communist Party of France.

The Second Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International replaced Terracini, Keibich, and Katterfeld with Gramsci (Italy), Smeral (Czechoslovakia), and Jordanov. Candidate members were Cannon ["Cook"] (USA) and Kuusinen (Finland).

By the time of the 4th Congress, the ECCI was run by a 5 person Secretariat consisting of Kuusinen (Finland), Kon, Eberlein (Germany), Rakosi (Hungary), and Minkin.

7. 4th World Congress—Petrograd and Moscow—November 5 - December 5, 1922.

A stenographic report of the 4th Congress of the Comintern was published in German in Hamburg in 1923 and in Russian translation that same year. A much-abridged report of the proceedings was published in London by the Communist Party of Great Britain circa 1923. The body opened at a meeting held in Petrograd on Nov. 5 before moving to Moscow for its subsequent meetings.

The 4th Congress was attended by a total of 393 delegates, including representatives of 58 Communist Parties. Some 340 of these delegates were given both voice and vote, 48 (including the Americans, members of a "sympathetic" rather than fully-affiliate party, the WPA) were allowed voice but not vote, and 5 were admitted as guests. The Workers Party of America sent three delegates, including Max Bedacht (who reported on the gathering to the Central Executive Committee of the WPA) and Alexander Trachtenberg. Also present was Alfred S. Edwards ("Sullivan"), a hardline member of the party's left.

The 4th Congress appointed an American Commission to study the situation and develop policy for the Communist Party of America. This commission consisted of Radek, Bukharin, Kuusinen, and Losovsky (replaced by Melnichansky) from Russia; Valetskii and Domski (Poland); Katayama (Japan); Kurela (Finland); Raavenstein (Holland); Eberlein (Germany); Lackie (England); Kobler (Czechoslovakia); Gamelon (France); Assaria (Italy); McLean (Ireland); and McDonald (Canada). This American Commission rebuked Edwards for an attack he launched on the political line of *The Worker*.

The gathering heard a keynote report by V.I. Lenin entitled "Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution."

The 4th Congress changed the structure of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. No longer would ECCI members be selected by member parties and responsible to those parties; henceforth the 25 members of the ECCI would be elected by one congress and be responsible for carrying out the decisions of that congress. These members of ECCI would be responsible only to the next congress. The 4th Congress elected *en bloc* a slate for the ECCI nominated by the Congress' Presidium.

8. 3rd Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—June 12-23, 1923.

A stenographic protocol of the 3rd Enlarged Plenum was published in German in Hamburg in 1923.

Israel Amter attended the sessions of the 3rd Enlarged Plenum as the delegate of the

Workers Party of America. He prepared an extensive report on the results of the gathering which was published in the party press in all languages in August 1923.

9. 5th World Congress—Moscow—June 17 - July 8, 1924.

The 5th World Congress of the Communist international was attended by 406 delegates from 41 countries, of whom 324 were delegates with full voting rights. As the historian E.H. Carr has noted:

"By far the most important event occurring within the orbit of the Cominteren between its Fourth and Fifth Congresses was the failure of the attempted German revolution of October 1923. The Fifth Congress could hardly fail to reflect the widening gap between the one party which had a victorious revolution to its credit and the parties which had failed, or had not even made the attempt. \* \* \*

The German failure of October 1923 proved the general need for a leadership in foreign communist parties more amenable to Russian example and guidance."

[fn. E.H. Carr, A History of Soviet Russia, (London: Macmillan, 1964) v. 7, pp. 70, 95.]

The failure of the German revolution was blamed on the "Brandlerite" leadership of the KPD and was used as cause for the removal of the current leadership and replacement with a new group hailing from the party's Left. At the same time, in Britain a Labour government came to power for the first time and accorded Soviet Russia with de jure recognition. As a result, the center of gravity of the international movement quickly shifted from Germany to England.

[fn. E.H. Carr, A History of Soviet Russia, (London: Macmillan, 1964) v. 7, pq. 72.]

A stenographic report of the 5th Congress was published in German in 2 volumes in 1924. A Russian translation was published in Moscow in 1925. A much-abridged report of the proceedings in English was published by the Communist Party of Great Britain circa 1925.

10. 4th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—June 12 and July 12-13, 1924.

The 4th Plenum of the Enlarged ECCI met for one day prior to the 5th World Congress and for two days after it ended. The July sessions dealt with matters referred to ECCI by the 5th Congress: reports for the Italian Commission by Manuilsky, for the Swedish Commission by Thaelmann, on behalf of the Bulgarian Commission, a resolution on Poland. The plenum also established a Negro Commission, including representatives of the British, French, and Belgian parties, to organize propaganda among the black population.

11. 5th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—March 21 - April 6, 1925.

A stenographic protocol of the 5th Enlarged Plenum was published in German in Hamburg in 1925.

The American delegates to the 5th Enlarged Plenum of ECCI included William Z. Foster ["Dorsey"], James P. Cannon, and John Williamson (YWL) for the majority; C.E. Ruthenberg ["Sanborn"], Jay Lovestone ["Powers"], and John Pepper for the minority. Cannon and Pepper were appointed to the Political Commission of the plenum, while Foster and Ruthenberg were appointed to the Commission on Trade Union Unity. Foster and Lovestone were also appointed to the Peasant Commission.

The main report was delivered by Grigorii Zinoviev, which set the line on the "partial stabilization" of capitalism and advanced the slogan of "Bolshevization" of communist parties.

James P. Cannon delivered a speech on the problems of Bolshevization of the American party and the question of a Labor Party in America on March 30, 1925.

The 5th Plenum had an American Commission, chaired by Otto Kuusinen with Jules Humbert-Droz its secretary.

12. 6th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—Feb. 17 - March 15, 1926.

The 6th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI met for the first time at 8 pm in the Andreev Hall of the Kremlin, the former throne room of the Tsar. A stenographic protocol of the 6th Enlarged Plenum was published in German in Hamburg in 1926. Extensive excerpts of the proceedings were published in English in the pages of International Press Correspondence, beginning with the March 4, 1926 issue.

The welcoming speech to the gathering was made by Chairman of the Comintern Grigorii Zinoviev, after which the credentials committee reported that 23 of the 43 members of ECCI were present (all with decisive vote), as were 14 of 27 candidate members (5 serving as substitutes with decisive vote, the other 9 with consultative vote). In addition, another 93 delegates representing 32 parties were present— 49 with decisive and 44 with consultative votes. In total, then, at the start of the plenum there were 77 delegates with decisive and 53 delegates with consultative vote.

The body unanimously elected predetermined slates to membership of the various commissions. The Political Commission was headed by Zinoviev and included representatives of the parties of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Belorussia, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Great Britain, Estonia, Finland, France, Holland, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, USA, Yugoslavia, and the Young Communist League. Other commissions included the Trade Union Commission (Monmousseau, Secretary); Eastern Commision (Roy, Secretary); British Commission (Braun, Secretary); French

Commission (Manuilsky, Secretary); American Commission (Robson, Secretary) and including Bukharin, Katayama, Kun, Kuusinen, Manuilsky, Stalin, Zetkin, and Zinoviev, among others; and a Scandinavian Commission (Remmele, Secretary).

A massive Keynote Report on the Activies of the ECCI was delivered over three sessions starting on Saturday, Feb. 20, 1926, by President of the Comintern Grigorii Zinoviev. In his speech, Zinoviev reaffirmed the idea of the "temporary stabilization of capitalism." A dual "perspective" was advocated, whereby the move to a new revolutionary period might be either fast (for example, in 2 years) or slow (in 10 years). Regardless, Zinoviev stated, "our diagnosis is the same as before: the death of capitalism, dictatorship of the proletariat within a comparatively short time!" Zinoviev more than once emphasized the importance of the 3rd Congress of the Comintern (1921) over that of the 4th (1922) and 5th (1924), strongly advocating the continuance of the slogan "To the Masses!" and the unceasing utilization of "United Front tactics." The goal, Zinoviev states, is to win the support of a majority of the working class to the leadership of the Communist Party—something that was as yet unobtained.

With regards to the United States, Zinoviev called America "but one of the links of world capitalsm as a whole (although the strongest link)" and calls it "the promised land of reformism." He sees a trend among the nations of Europe towards the "Americanization" of the labor movement, attempts to strip the trade unions of their radical political perspective and to reduce them to negotiating devices for purely monetary objectives. Zinoviev criticized both "Ultra-Left" (anti-United Front) and "Right" (Social Democratic) opposition movements within the Communist Parties, and is critical of the misapplication of United Front tactics by erstwhile well-meaning supporters of the Comintern general line. He advocated increased "self-reliance and independence" among the parties of the Comintern, while acknowledging situations in which the CI must "dissolve some CC" and "appoint another in its place" due to "situations when this can not be helped."

13. 7th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—Nov. 22 - Dec. 16, 1926.

A stenographic protocol of the 7th Enlarged Plenum was published in German in Hamburg in 1927. A Russian translation was published in two volumes in Moscow that same year. Extensive extracts of the proceedings appeared in English translation in the pages of *International Press Correspondence*, starting with the Dec. 1, 1926 issue.

The Enlarged Plenum was chaired by Nikolai Bukharin, who delivered the main report at the November 23 session, "The World Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern."

At the 17th Session, the morning of December 7, losef Stalin delivered a report "On Inner-Party Questions of the CPSU," a speech which was published in English in the Jan. 6, 1927 issue of *Inprecorr*. The material was not published again in English until 1954, when it appeared under the title "Once More on the Social-Democratic Deviation in Our Party" in volume 9 of Stalin's *Works*.

World Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism—Brussels —Feb. 10 -XX, 1927.

The World Congress Against Colonia Oppression and Imperialism was attended by 152 delegates from 37 countries. A German language official protocol was published in Berlin in 1927.

This Congress was organized by the Third International as a "united front" organization attempting to unite the working class of various tendencies around a common program. The body approved a resolution moved jointly by the British, Indian, and Chinese delegations on the duties of the working class of the countries of the advanced, imperialist world against the national liberation movements of the less developed, colonial nations. The Congress also issued a manifesto, "To All Oppressed Peoples and Classes."

On the report of Willi Münzenberg, General Secretary of International Workers' Relief, an international organization called The League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression and For National Independence was established.

14. 8th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—May 18-30, 1927.

15. 9th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—Feb. 9-25, 1928.

The 9th Enlarged plenum opened on Feb. 9, 1928, with 44 voting delegates and 48 non-voting delegates from 27 countries in attendance.

An article in *Pravda* published shortly before the Plenum convened declared that the masses were moving to the left while international Social Democracy was shifting rightward. The Comintern was to intensify its struggle against the Social Democrats in this new Third Period of revolutionary upsurge.

16. 6th World Congress—Moscow—July 17 - September 1, 1928.

A stenographic report of the 5th Congress was published in German in 4 volumes in Hamburg in 1928. A Russian translation was published in Moscow in 1929. A substantial extract of the proceedings in English was published in book form by International Press Correspondence, circa 1928.

17. 10th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—July 3-19, 1929.

A stenographic protocol of the 10th Enlarged Plenum was published in Russian circa 1929.

The plenum was attended by 36 delegates with voting rights and 72 delegates with voice but no vote.

Enlarged Presidium of ECCI—Moscow—February XX-XX, 1930.

The Presidium of ECCI met in enlarged session in February of 1930. On Feb. 25, 1930, V.M. Molotov delivered an extensive report to the gathering, later published as a pamphlet under the title *The New Phase in the Soviet Union*.

First International Conference of Negro Workers—Hamburg, Germany —July 7-8, 1930.

The First International Conference of Negro Workers was held in Hamburg, Germany from July 7-8, 1930. The gathering was attended by 17 delegates and 3 fraternal delegates, from 7 different countries and was formally called by "the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers," an offshoot of the Profintern.

The Provisional Executive Committee responsible for convening the conference was headed by James W. Ford of the National Committee of the Trade Union Unity League (USA) and included M. Ali (France), M.E. Burns (England), Mary Burroughs (USA), Otto Hall (USA), Johnstone Kenyatta (Kenya), Isaac Munsey (USA), George Padmore (USA), Lucas Prentice (USA), Henry Rosemond (Haiti), and W. Thibedi (South Africa).

The Conference elected the following Executive Committee: Secretary: James W. Ford (USA); Members: I. Hawkins (USA), Garan Kouyatté (Dakar, Africa), Frank Macaulay (Nigeria), Helen McClain (USA), Albert Nzulu (South Africa), George Padmore (USA). E. Reid (Jamaica), E.F. Small (Gambia). Alternate: M. Kotani (South Africa).

The main report was delivered to the Conference by James W. Ford. Other reports were delivered by George Padmore ("Economic Struggles and Tasks of the Negro Workers"), William Wilson ("The Struggle Against Forced Labor and Poll Tax"), and Frank Macaulay ("The War Danger and its Significance to the Nego Masses.")

The gathering adopted a series of resolutions on black workers and the labor movement, the struggle against forced labor, in opposition to the British Labour government, on black workers and the war danger, against lynching, and in favor of international solidarity of the black working class.

18. 11th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—March 25 - April 13, 1931.

A stenographic protocol of the 10th Enlarged Plenum was published in Russian in 1932. The proceeding was chaired by Dmitrii Manuilsky.

The American Delegate to the 11th Enlarged Plenum of ECCI was Earl Browder. He spoke at the gathering, stating that President Franklin Roosevelt was leading America on "the Fascist path."

19. 12th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—Aug. 27 - Sept. 15, 1932.

The 12th Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International was attended by 38 voting delegates and 136 with voice but no vote.

The 12th Plenum was opened by Ernst Thälmann. The main reports were delivered by Otto Kuusinen ("The International Situation and the Taskts of the Parties"), Thälmann ("The Lessons of Economic Strikes and the Struggle of the Unemployed"), and Dmitrii Manuilsky (on Socialist Construction in the USSR).

20. 13th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI—Moscow—Nov. 28 - December 12, 1933.

This was the final Enlarged Plenary session of the ECCI and was attended by representatives of 72 sections of the Comintern. A protocol of the 13th Enlarged Plenum was published in Russian in 1934. The English language translations of the theses and main reports of the gathering were collected in an American volume entitled Theses, Reports, Speeches of the Thirteenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International: Held in Moscow, December 1933. A similar book was issued in Great Britain.

The American delegate to the 13th Plenum was Earl Browder.

The 13th Enlarged Plenum was opened by Wilhelm Pieck. The body heard a keynote report by Otto Kuusinen entitled "Fascism, the Danger of War, and the Tasks of the Communist Parties" and additional reports on various national parties by Pieck (Germany), Pollitt (Great Britain), Ohano (Japan), and China (Wan Ming and Kang Sin). Additional speeches were made by Piatnitsky ("The Communist Parties in the Fight for the Masses") and Knorin ("Fascism, Social-Democracy, and the Communists.")

The 13th Plenum also carried out supplementary elections to the Presidium of ECCI and adopted a set of theses based upon the reports delivered. "All decisions were adopted by the Plenum unanimously," it was proudly reported.

21. 7th World Congress—Moscow—July 25 - August 20, 1935.

sources: E.H. Carr: *A History of Soviet Russia* (in 14 vol.). (Macmillan, 1950-1978). E.H. Carr: *Twilight of the Comintern*. (Pantheon, 1982). Jane Degras (ed.): *The Communist International* (in 3 vol.). (Oxford University Press). A.I. Sobolev et al.: *Outline History of the Communist International*. (Progress Publishers, 1971).